Matisse Drawings

Curated by Ellsworth Kelly from
The Pierre and Tana Matisse
Foundation Collection

INTERVIEW

Ellsworth Kelly Interviewed
by John R. Stomberg
Spencertown, New York
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JRS: You once mentioned to me that the artists who "look over your shoulder" as you work in the studio are mostly deceased. Could you start by talking about these artists who you esteem?

EK: Yeah. Let's take Monet.[1] He went to Belle-île off the Brittany coast in 1886. Matisse[2] went there, too, about ten years later (1897–98). I went there, too, in 1949, before I knew that either artist had been there. Later, in 1952, when I found out [about Monet's travels] from a book on Monet by Georges Clemenceau, back when Monet had probably just died, I was very surprised.[3] I studied art at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston where they had many Monets and none of them were late. And the French didn't like the late paintings at all.

It was in 1952 that I visited Giverny. I had written a letter to Jean, Monet's stepson,[4] and he wrote back immediately saying, "Why don't you come out to visit." Jean liked young people, and we were just students. I went out with a friend, the painter Jack Youngerman.[5] We went into the house and saw some older paintings, and Jean started talking about them. I said, "I know all about the early work. I want to know what Monet did during the last 26 years of his life," and he said, "I'll show you."

The late paintings were all still there in the studio—15 studies that were not in the Orangerie [Musée de l'Orangerie] in Paris. I had never seen these last works in the Orangerie, as the museum was always closed. At Giverny, the 15 late paintings each had two easels. They were not the ones that everyone had been buying. After my visit to Giverny, I went to my gallery in Paris, one of the big galleries, in which I had a show—Gallerie Maeght—and I said to Maeght, "There are great paintings out there. Why don't you guys wake up? Go out there." He said, "They are worthless, no one likes them."

One of the paintings in Monet's studio was a big white painting. It has disappeared since then. I remember that it had two small stabs; a huge painting with two stabs and the canvas was still flapped down. I asked Jean, "Who did this?" and Jean said, "Monet did it because he was dissatisfied with it." Well, the next day, I painted a green/blue painting. I wanted to see if I could do a monochrome.

JRS: That early?

1. Claude Monet (French, 1840–1926).

2. Henri Matisse (French, 1869–1954).

3. It is likely that Kelly read either Georges Clemenceau's *Claude Monet, les Nymphéas* (Paris: Plon, 1928) or *Claude Monet: The Water Lilies* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1930).

4. Jean-Pierre Hoschedé (French, 1877–1961).

5. Jack Youngerman (American, b. 1926).

EK: Yes. And it's strange that I was dissatisfied the same way doing my green painting that Monet was with his white painting. I wrapped up my green painting, and I didn't unwrap it until the 1980s when they had a show about "color alone" in Lyon.[6] It was a big exhibition and the curator wanted several of my paintings. I had two rooms. The director said, "You don't happen to have a monochrome, do you?" So I unwrapped my green painting for the first time since 1952. And I wrote him and said, "Yes, I have a monochrome that I did after visiting Monet." He said, "Ok, we'll put it in the show in the historical section, next to a Miró[7] that is all blue with a little red dot."

JRS: So Monet had a major influence on you early in your career. Do you still go and look at this work?

EK: Since 1952, I have been back to Giverny only once, but I returned to Belle-île several times, most recently about five years ago after [Daniel] Wildenstein sent me the Monet catalogue raisonné. There were four volumes, and I went through them all and wanted to return to Belle-île to see some of the places where Monet had painted and where I made drawings of several of the same sites.

JRS: OK, I see how Monet's work—especially those late paintings—inspired you as you became aware of them. Now could you discuss what it is that you have learned from artists from the pre-modern past and how your work relates or deviates from those traditions?

EK: Well, when I got to Paris in 1949, I shut out a lot of older paintings. I turned quite quickly to abstraction. But I did love the Renaissance above all, and I had good training in Renaissance art while still in Boston. I was fascinated by, and have always loved, all of the great painters. But when I got to Paris, I felt I had to think very seriously about what I wanted to do. And I decided that I wanted to make paintings that I hadn't seen before.

JRS: Was there one Old Master you particularly admired?

EK: Pollaiuolo![8] He was one of my favorite painters. I did a self-portrait in the manner of Pollaiuolo once. I also did a copy of a Tintoretto.[9] That was an assignment at school. But, I loved them all. I mean, I studied and read a great deal on the Renaissance. And I still enjoy going to see all of the Old Masters.

JRS: Does your work relate to theirs?

EK: Well, by 1952 I had already been to the south of France and started my multi-paneled works, which really form a break from that tradition. In 1951 I sent one back to Boston, to Ralph [Coburn] who was working at Mursky [Gallery] then. I sent it to him rolled up because it cost too much to send

6. *La couleur seule: L'expérience du monochrome*, 1988, Museé St. Pierre.

7. Joan Miró (Spanish, 1893–1983).

8. Antonio Pollaiuolo (Italian, 1431/32–1498).

9. Domenico Tintoretto (Italian, 1560–1635).

otherwise—I didn't have the money. I sent it in a tube, and Ralph stretched it for me. But it got stopped at customs because they thought it was some kind of code. It was during the Korean War.

JRS: Oh, right.

EK: Well, they thought it was some kind of message. [Laughter] The Director of the Museum School had to go down and say that it is just a painting.

JRS: And these works broke dramatically from the past?

EK: Yes. I always thought that Renaissance art, not earlier art, but High Renaissance art, like da Vinci's,[10] is about painting figures mimetically—painting what you see. It is really naturalism. When I was in France I studied a lot of older paintings. There I was at the Louvre seeing all of these paintings and seeing how Renaissance art developed. And then, you know you can follow that story through Rembrandt[11] and Velázquez[12] right up to Constable[13] and Turner[14] (who really brought Impressionism into being). And that tradition of mimesis continues right up to about 1877; and then came Cézanne[15] and Monet with their attention to the flattened surface. Now people looked at their paintings to see how they were done, and they focused on the surface, while before that, in the Renaissance, there was always a window, and the story of the painting was everything that was inside that window. Especially with Cézanne—he made the surface the interesting thing. You can get up close to it and think, "How did he do this?" And the late Monet is certainly that way, too.

JRS: You're identifying an essential shift in emphasis in the work of these late 19th-century painters away from the idea of the painting being a window through which we see and toward it becoming a surface at which we look?

EK: Right. Then I said, "Where do I stand and where do some of these others stand, like Pollock?"[16] And I realized that there had been another shift. Now it became about the space between the surface of the painting and the viewer—that space became active. Do you see the difference?

JRS: Yes, I think I do.

EK: My paintings are active in this space between the painting and the viewer.

JRS: They are, absolutely. And that's the radical shift that you brought back from France that was not recognized right away?

EK: Yes. At that first show in New York in 1956 with half of my French paintings, no one really commented on it. It has taken me a long time to get attention to that very early work. Now, I think people have been collecting it and respond to it.

10. Leonardo da Vinci (Italian, 1452–1519).

11. Rembrandt van Rijn (Dutch, 1606–1669).

12. Diego Velázquez (Spanish, 1599–1660).

13. John Constable (English, 1776–1837).

14. Joseph Mallord William Turner (English, 1775–1851).

15. Paul Cézanne (French, 1839–1906).

16. Jackson Pollock (American, 1912–1956).

JRS: Your work is clearly a dominant force in abstraction of the later 20th century. Is there a Picasso to your Matisse? That is, have you had another living artist whose work has propelled your work in new directions?

EK: Well I would say that the school of Paris artists like Brancusi[17] and Picasso[18] were important to me. And of the Americans, I would say Calder[19] is the only person I feel close to artistically—he was a good friend, too.

JRS: Calder?

EK: Yes, when he died, he had just opened a major show at the Whitney [Museum of American Art in New York]. He had a place in New York where he stayed with Louisa, his wife, and their two daughters. And he was also close to my good friend Jack Youngerman and his wife Delphine (Delphine Seyrig the French actress, a very wonderful actress). Well, we were all close friends. And so I was up here already [in upstate New York] and Jack said, "Calder asked for you just before he died." He said, "You know, he was very, very fond of you." And I was very fond of him. I saw a lot of him early on. I used to go up to Connecticut to see him when he was there, and I saw him in Paris because we were in the same gallery.

JRS: What is it about Calder's work that attracts you?

EK: Well, essentially it's free. It's free and it has the European colors, too.

JRS: When did you begin to think about Matisse in the context of your own work and do you still?

EK: At the beginning, in 1948, I branched off him, really. I loved his drawings. But at the time, painting was Picasso. And Beckmann,[20] too. (He came to talk in Boston.) I had a teacher who was a German Expressionist, Karl Zerbe,[21] and so I tried to paint like that, and Matisse was painting a lot of things that seemed to be of another school. I didn't get to Matisse until I was in France. I felt drawn away. I mean, I loved Picasso and I loved Matisse, too. He went to the South and painted beautiful women. Odalisques. I knew his drawing, and that was very important to me. Picasso made me want to paint, but Matisse drawings made me want to draw.

JRS: That is probably what made me think of asking you to work on a Matisse drawings show.

EK: Yes, well, a lot of people have said, "I always thought your drawings look like Matisse." But they don't. My drawings are very American. Matisse evoked space. For instance, when he would do leaves or fruit or still lifes, he would leave openings. Like this would be a leaf [gestures in a vaguely C shape in the air]. But my drawings are about shapes; the forms are closed.

17. Constantin Brancusi (Romanian, active in France, 1876–1957).

18. Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973).

19. Alexander Calder (American, 1898–1976).

20. Max Beckmann (German, 1884–1950).

21. Karl Zerbe (American, 1903–1972).

JRS: Yes, I see that in your work—an emphasis on drawing shapes found in your subject.

EK: But after working with them [the Matisse drawings] while curating the show, I got to know them very well. And you know each one, and each one has something to hit on—something that you land on, and it's exciting. And then you can follow his lines through the drawing. He doesn't, he can't, make a mark without it being a Matisse. I mean a single mark. Everything that he does involves his fantastic drawing—painting, sculpture.

JRS: At times Matisse tilts his crayon or pencil up to get the hard edge and then goes flat to make a wide mark, and through this he evokes space and volume.

EK: Well, he evokes space very much this way, and he does so in his paintings, too. I do love Matisse, but it came slowly. When I was younger, it seemed like it was too easy for him. I mean that's part of it. He couldn't draw a pencil line without knowing what he was going to do with it.

JRS: It is tempting to see Matisse's inspiration for you as mostly about the drawing—especially clear in your line drawings of plants—rather than his use of color. Is this fair?

EK: Matisse is a fantastic colorist. I mean, sometimes you can understand Picasso's colorings because very often he uses opposites, but with Matisse, I've never understood how he uses color. It's his own. The Europeans used spectral colors. You can think of Kandinsky[22] in 1912 or Léger's[23] colors. In America, it wasn't until the Pop artists came on the scene in the '60s with their embrace of commercial color that you find it in artists like Warhol[24] and Roy [Lichtenstein][25] with all of the other Pop artists using spectral colors. But, as Benjamin Buchloh [Professor of Modern Art, Harvard University] said to me, I came back [from Paris] in 1954 with a different color sense, but it was ignored. Also, Ann Temkin at the Modern [Chief Curator at the Museum of Modern Art, New York] recently said, "You were really the only artist in the 1959 *Sixteen Americans* show painting with strong spectral colors." And, she said, "The first one we [MoMA] bought from the show was a black and white!"

JRS: These spectral colors, they've become yours—you know, "Kelly red" or "Kelly blue."

EK: In Europe, I used a color wheel and focused on the 12 colors of the spectrum. I made my first spectrum painting in 1953 when I was still in Paris. Now that work is in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art .

JRS: Are there particular colors to which you personally respond strongly?

22. Vassily Kandinsky (Russian, 1866–1944).

23. Fernand Léger (French, 1881–1955).

24. Andy Warhol (American, 1928–1987).

25. Roy Lichtenstein (American, 1923–1997).

EK: No, I have no preference: I like all colors equally. I came to know color from a Mr. Munsell[26] who, I think, came from Boston. I studied the Munsell chart, and it stayed with me. I found, just looking at the Munsell color chart, that I liked each of the colors at its purest spectral state, not mixed. Here, [showing his well worn copy of Munsell's book] each color has pages of little tabs, and I always took off the most spectral ones to put them together to make my own spectral chart.

JRS: So, can we separate the discussion of drawing from that of color?

EK: Well, they come from an entirely different place. First, it is very much your own—each artist's use of line and how that relates to their color sense. For me, I begin all my work with drawing. All my sculptures as well as paintings come from drawing. It's like the support for my art. I draw all the time—everything is done with drawings, and anyone who wants to study my work in the future will probably use my drawings.

JRS: As you have worked with Matisse drawings for this exhibition, have you encountered any surprises or made new discoveries about his work?

EK: For the show I only worked with photos, but when I saw the actual drawings at the installation, I realized that one has to see the real drawings: they are incredible!

JRS: Some of the Matisse drawings that you chose are very, very simple—just a few lines for some of them. I was surprised you didn't always go for the finished drawings.

26. Professor Albert H. Munsell (American, 1858–1918) taught at the Massachusetts Normal Art School, now the Massachusetts College of Art and Design.

Exhibition curator Ellsworth Kelly works with Florence Finch Abbott Director John R. Stomberg to install the *Matisse Drawings* exhibition at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum.

EK: Well, I couldn't show them all, so I just chose the ones of which I was the most fond. I like the ones that reveal him working, where you can follow his progress.

JRS: Drawing seems to have a special place in the practice of many artists. Could you talk about the special place that drawing occupies in terms of how it functions within your art and speculate about where it fit within Matisse's?

EK: Well, the Museum School in Boston was an academic school, and they taught drawing. They had a good teacher [Ture Bengtz]. One time I was struggling with drawing a nude. He said, "You just can't copy it. You have to understand how it moves." Of course, I was looking at a lot of artists and how they have done it and their secrets. And you look at Matisse and Picasso and you realize they took a lot of liberties with their arms over here and no feet sometimes. But they're always right. Every mark is right for the volume. And that's very hard to do. So, one time Bengtz came by and he looked at my drawing and he said, "You didn't get that shoulder right." He took his pencil and onto my drawing he made three lines. I said, "How did you do that?" He said, "I'm going to teach you. I'm going to teach you how to see. When you see it, you can draw it."

JRS: Ture Bengtz is not a very well-known artist.

EK: Yes, but I owe him the foundation of my drawing. And of course, I had seen Picasso drawings, which are contour drawings. But, there is a long history with Rubens[27] and all of the Italians who did contour drawings, and he [Bengtz] taught me how to see those, too.

JRS: In 1932 Matisse produced his great artist's book *Poésies* with the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé. There was consensus among many critics that nobody could ever again add images to the poem because Matisse had done such a perfect job. Sixty years later, you produced *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard ~ Stéphane Mallarmé* with a set of lithographs, and it is an entirely successful collaboration between text and image. Could you discuss how you felt about venturing into an area that had been strongly associated with Matisse? Were you thinking about his work as you began your project?

EK: I thought it couldn't look like Matisse.

JRS: That is perhaps a good thing.

EK: Yes. I had a hard time getting a book, but finally, they contacted me. The publishers choose the book. I liked it because of the way Mallarmé did it—the way he composed the poem visually. Have you seen it?

27. Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577–1640).

JRS: Yes, and I really admire your response to the poem.

EK: So I decided to do the book with all of the forms that I had been using. When I got the poem, I read it and I said, "I really have to explain this, the way it looks." You know, there's no surprises or discoveries otherwise, and everything he [Mallarmé] does is a surprise.

JRS: Have you seen the Matisse version now?

EK: Yes, and while he never draws the same thing exactly, a lot of them are related. It's like Picasso—they always come up with something new as they are progressing in their life even when it's the same subject. But every drawing is a new drawing.

JRS: OK, so as we wrap up, could you please talk about Boston and the German tradition? I mean you came out of the same town, same school, same time as all those artists who inherited a very Germanic tradition and you emerged with a much more French sensibility.

EK: Well, Karl Zerbe once told me, he could not critique people who worked in color. But I did a big collage in color, and it was on a long strip. We had to do a design for a ballet, and I chose to look at Picasso. I did the costumes and the sets by doing collages of cut-outs and the school kept it because it was so good.

JRS: And that was around 1949?

EK: It was 1948; I was in my second year and Zerbe came to see me at my studio to look at the things I had done. And some of them are in the San Francisco Museum now. And he said, "I can't talk about your work." You see, the work of the German Expressionists like Kirchner[28] and Nolde[29] was very colorful. Europeans did use color, all colors, but I think that in America we didn't follow that too much. Well, except I guess they did in advertising. And some painters, I think, did, too—the abstract painters from the '20s and '30s and later—Stuart Davis and that crowd.

JRS: So when you decided to look deliberately at France, was that rebellious in the context of the Museum School? A way to make your work revolutionary?

EK: No, I was just enjoying my life.

28. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (German, 1880–1938).

29. Emil Nolde (French, 1867–1956).

INTRODUCTION

"Drawing is like making an expressive gesture with the advantage of permanence."
—Henri Matisse

Matisse's shadow extends across the art of the 20th century and beyond. His individual explorations of form, color, and line define a high modernism in which it is often these very concerns, rather than narrative content, that carry the weight of emotional expressiveness. He drew constantly, and his direct, elegant draftsmanship has become a hallmark of modern drawing.

A particular, largely singular, economy of line characterizes the drawings of Matisse. A seemingly simple curve simultaneously defines a shoulder, establishes its place in relation to the picture plane, suggests its volume, outlines the shape of the upper torso, and lends an emotional tenor to the sitter. His lines are complex descriptive instruments that at first glance appear understated. A majority of what Matisse communicates with his drawings he achieves through implication, rather than replication. It is an approach often emulated and seldom mastered.

Matisse Drawings: Curated by Ellsworth Kelly from The Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation Collection features Matisse drawings from across 50 years—1900 to 1950—that is, through most of his career. They range from fully realized compositions to quick sketches, and from studies for known paintings to repeated views of a single detail. Some of these works are well known, including his portraits of the poet Louis Aragon and his self-portrait from 1937. Others are less well researched, especially the small anatomical studies. The selection allows viewers to explore Matisse's draftsmanship across the spectrum of his work in drawing.

The selection also reveals the special eye of our guest curator: Ellsworth Kelly. He chose works in which he found a personal affinity and which reflect the French master's strengths and process. Kelly relished the moments in Matisse's drawing when an initial line established the fate of the composition. Rather than outlining the whole subject, Matisse often began with a single bold establishing line. This opening mark could indicate an arm, a breast, or folded

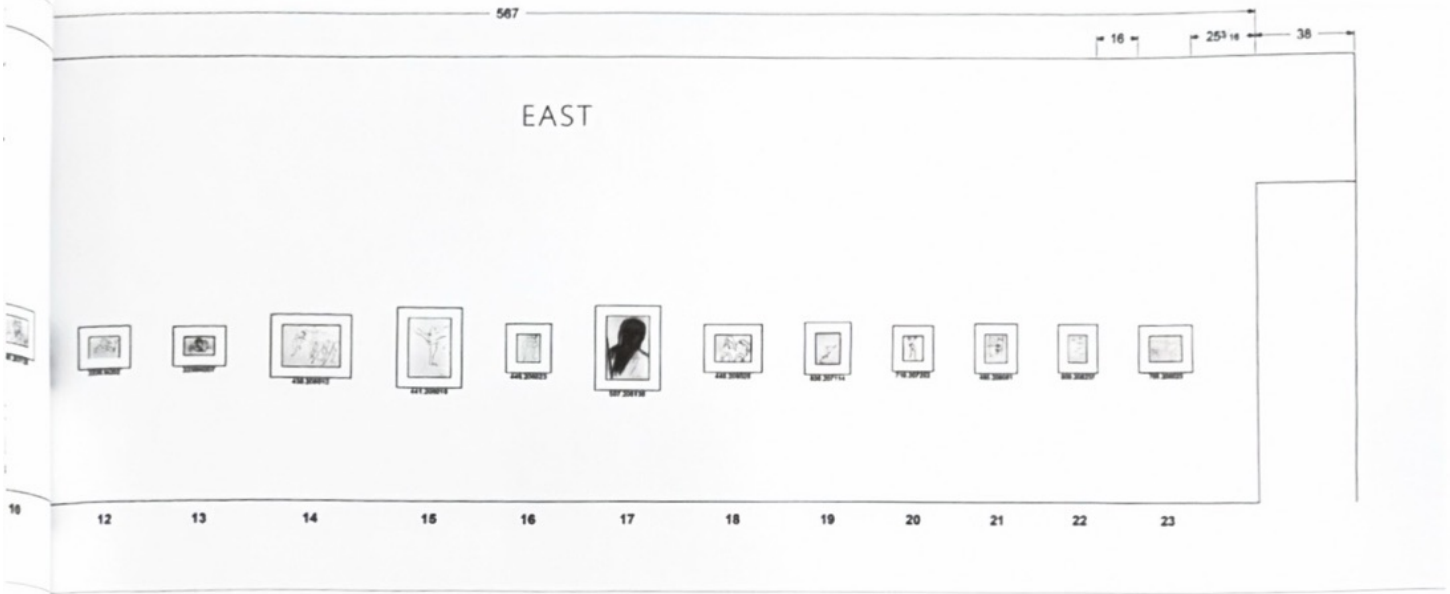
hands—something from the interior of the drawing. Continuing on with that commitment to placement, he frequently reached the paper's edge without "completing" the subject. Heads or other body parts end abruptly in these cases. No accident, these compositions regale the viewer with tales of their creation, drawing attention to drawing as a verb first and noun second.

Kelly himself has always been active with drawing. Indeed, Kelly's drawings since 1950 share an uncanny sensibility with those of Matisse while remaining formally distinct. Both artists capture complex ideas of space and shape with limited means, drawing with a rare degree of certainty, fluidity, and circumspection. (In the big picture, the two artists split the 20th century—Matisse in the first half and Kelly in the second half.) But Kelly's drawings delineate shapes where Matisse's suggest forms. This distinction is made clear by comparing the botanical prints Kelly made with Galerie Maeght in the mid-1960s to the Matisse drawings Kelly selected for the exhibition. Whereas Kelly translated each leaf, stem, or fruit into closed shapes, Matisse famously left his drawings quite open.

In Kelly's drawings we can find the basis for some of his other work as well. For him, abstraction maintains its original sense—to abstract something essential from a subject. His botanical prints (clear transcriptions of his draftsmanship) offer a glimpse into his overall practice of finding subtle universality in the basic shapes found in nature. We can imagine as well each leaf inspiring the composition of one of his seemingly non-objective paintings or prints. Careful observation has always been a key part of his art, and he certainly brought that approach to bear on the process of selecting drawings for his *Matisse Drawings* exhibition.

For this exhibition, Kelly not only made the selection, but he also designed every detail of the installation. Each drawing was reframed and matted to match his specific visual goals. He asked for particular crème-colored mats and pale wood frames so as not to draw attention away from the artworks. The drawings were spaced evenly in a single row around the entire gallery. There was no break in the march of framed works for labels or didactic texts. The installation created a virtual horizon line on the wall of the gallery that (at least obliquely) recalls the proportions of some of Kelly's abstract work. While every Matisse drawing was shown to its best advantage, Kelly's aesthetic added dramatically to the experience of the exhibition. Viewers walked through an Ellsworth Kelly composition to see Henri Matisse drawings—an experience that deliberately invites them to see the one artist's work through the eyes of the other.

—John R. Stomberg, Florence Finch Abbott Director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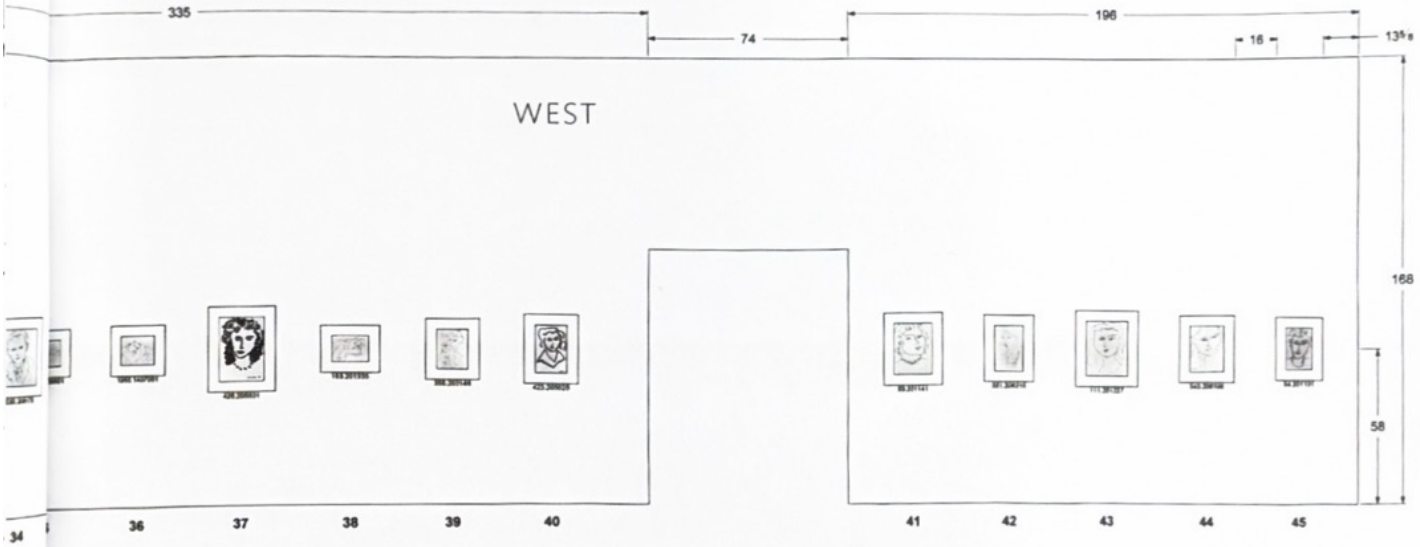
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INTRODUCTION

"Since birth we get accustomed to seeing and thinking at the same time. But I think that if you can turn off the mind and look at things only with your eyes, ultimately everything becomes abstract." —Ellsworth Kelly[1]

The world-renowned American painter and sculptor Ellsworth Kelly began his ascent to fame in the early 1960s as a key figure in Hard Edge, Color Field, and Minimalist painting. Although mostly nonrepresentational in nature, his distinguished works of art are often rooted in his vision. Whether based on a fleeting memory of (or a chance encounter with) a shape, his works are frequently distillations of objects translated into a broad expanse of a single hue or a rigid geometric form. And yet while Kelly's name is now synonymous with such abstraction, a more lyrical side of his oeuvre is apparent in a body of over 1,000 botanical drawings that he has created during the last four decades—a bridge between his figurative work and abstraction.

Thumbing through his print catalogue raisonné, one notices how often the crisp contour lines of Kelly's plant imagery are interspersed along the spectrum of his career: botanicals appear in 1964–66, 1973–74, 1978, 1979–80, 1981–82, and 1983–85.[2] Drawing has always been a part of Kelly's life, but he credits his instructor Ture Bengtz (1907–1973), from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, for teaching him how to see. Kelly's first published image, a linocut of daffodils, appeared on the cover of his high school newspaper in 1938. Studies at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn (1941–43) gave him formal instruction, and even while on active duty in Europe (1944–45), the artist filled his sketchbooks with watercolor and contour drawings.[3]

Kelly continues to sketch nearly daily, and often these preliminary drawings are the basis for his prints. The Mount Holyoke College Art Museum exhibition, *Plant Lithographs by Ellsworth Kelly, 1964–1966*, represents a selection of prints from the artist's first lithographic suite of plant drawings. The 28-image series ranges from flowering shrubs to succulent citrus fruits, including lemon, orange, tangerine, and grapefruit, all reflecting Kelly's time in southern France during late 1964 through the summer of 1965. The suite was created in Paris

1. Ellsworth Kelly as quoted in Richard H. Axsom, *Drawn from Nature: The Plant Lithographs of Ellsworth Kelly* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press with Grand Rapids Art Museum, 2005) 21.

2. See Richard Axsom and Phylis Floyd, *The Prints of Ellsworth Kelly: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1987).

3. Axsom, *Drawn from Nature: The Plant Lithographs of Ellsworth Kelly,* 13.

with master printer Marcel Durassier at Imprimerie Maeght and with Imprimerie Arte, and then released by the Maeght Editeur publishing house.[4] Following this project, Kelly would go on to produce more than 250 print editions over the course of his career, bolstering his reputation as a painter and sculptor as well as a leading American printmaker.

Suite of Plant Lithographs originated as a simple sketch of two leaves on a napkin in a Paris café, establishing the model for Kelly's creative process. He began by drawing each image in pencil, ink, or crayon on paper, always representing one single object decontextualized from its environment. Kelly describes his approach: "The plant drawings . . . are exact observations of the form of the leaf or flower or fruit seen. Nothing is changed or added: no shading, no surface making. They are not an approximation of the thing seen nor are they a personal expression or an abstraction. . . . My lesson was to see objectively, to erase all 'meaning' of the thing seen. Then only, could the real meaning of it be understood and felt."[5] The contemplative process of looking and blocking the mind from its endless analyzing—searching to label the smell, color, texture, weight, scale, and name of each plant—leaves Kelly's eyes open to truly discern the essential shape of the life form. Transitioning this sketch into the grand scale of the lithograph is the final step in completing his vision.

Kelly often discovers his plant subjects by chance and sketches them with intimate attention; his sequence of drawing on lithographic transfer paper in the studio is a dynamic performance in contrast. He works in large scale, moving his crayon across the paper with broad, sweeping arm gestures. A single leaf might be created in two swift strokes from top to bottom. A more complex lithograph, such as *Lemon,* suggests slight shifts in the speed and pressure of his searching line. The nuances of this line quality are represented as an exact replica in the printed transfer lithograph, a process that appeals to the artist for its sheer physicality. Kelly relies on the skill of a master printer who takes his fluid wax crayon drawing, imprints it in reverse on a lithographic stone, and then editions it as an exact likeness of the original image, rather than a mirror-image, as is true of many print techniques.

These botanicals, which seem to be effortlessly executed, generally take Kelly mere minutes to draw, and yet they are the result of acute study and practice during the artist's lengthy career. Although Kelly and Henri Matisse never met in person, their dedication to this subject, and the task of truly "seeing," places them as constant points of comparison. Their depictions of plants like those on view in the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum's exhibitions naturally converse and call out their unique qualities. Where Matisse celebrates their vitality

4. The renowned gallery owners Aimé and Marguerite Maeght had been advocates for Kelly's work since 1951, exhibiting his paintings during the 1950s and 1960s. *Suite of Plant Lithographs* was Kelly's final project with Maeght. After his return to New York, he collaborated with New York printers from that time forward. See Axsom, *The Prints of Ellsworth Kelly: A Catalogue Raisonné,* 19.

5. Ellsworth Kelly, "Notes from 1969," in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings,* ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996) 92.

through exuberant lines, Kelly distills his observations down to concise, concentrated forms. Each one is a meditation—a masterful synthesis of eye, mind, and hand, as the artist skillfully reduces the complex subjects to their most crucial elements. As Kelly reflects, "You must not copy nature. You must let nature instruct you and then let the eye and the hand collaborate."[6] Although devoid of color, shading, or detail, Kelly's prints capture the tangible object in its purest form.

—Rachel G. Beaupré
Assistant Curator

6. Kelly as quoted in Axsom, *Drawn from Nature: The Plant Lithographs of Ellsworth Kelly*, 22.